



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
NEWS RELEASE

Department of Toxic Substances Control

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California Hospitals Receive Awards for Mercury Elimination

SACRAMENTO --- Citing the need to continue the reduction of hazardous waste from California hospitals, Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) Director Ed Lowry at an awards ceremony in Sacramento commended five California hospitals for virtually eliminating mercury within their facilities. The dinner was part of the Hospital Alliance Association (HospAA) Conference, and marked the formal kick-off for the "Mercury (Hg) Elimination Leadership Program (HELP).

"HELP" is a joint effort between the DTSC, the California Department of Health Services, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region IX, Hospitals for a Healthy Environment, the California Hospital Association, and California hospitals working toward the elimination of mercury. Recipients of the commendations were:

- Mr. Simon I. Dias, Director of Facility Services, Kaiser Permanente Fontana Medical Center
- Mr. Willie Austin, Environmental Services Manager, Kaiser Permanente Fresno Medical Center
- Ms. Kimberly Kelley, Environmental Health and Safety Officer, Kaiser Permanente Roseville Medical Center
- Mr. Paul Brenninger, Manager of Facilities Services, Kaiser Permanente Santa Rosa Medical Center
- Ms. Mirna Cintron, Environmental and Safety Specialist, Stanford Hospitals and Clinics.

Elimination of mercury by these hospitals means they:

1. Inventoried all mercury devices and sources.
2. Replaced, at a minimum, 75 percent of sphygmomanometers, clinical mercury-containing devices, and laboratory chemical containing mercury, mercury laboratory thermometers and prepared a plan for elimination of the remaining devices.

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3. Replaced patient mercury thermometers with non-mercury-containing devices.
4. Developed and implemented a fluorescent light tube recycling program.
5. Developed and implemented a mercury and alkaline battery collection program.
6. Prepared and put into practice an Environmental Preferable Purchasing (EPP) statement that bans the purchase of mercury-containing items without prior approval.

Mercury is a reproductive toxin and a potent neurotoxin. When hospitals throw away mercury-containing devices such as fever thermometers, blood pressure cuffs, and other products, mercury can re-enter the environment through gases released by landfills and through leaching into the groundwater. Many publicly owned water treatment works are now requiring hospitals to meet strict wastewater treatment discharge limits for mercury. When mercury-containing waste is incinerated, the mercury is vaporized into the air. According to the U.S. EPA, medical waste incinerators are the fourth largest source of mercury going into the environment. Mercury fever thermometers alone contribute about 17 tons of mercury to solid waste landfills annually. By participating in the HELP program, the hospitals recognized during the awards dinner have adopted safer practices, which reduced the amount of mercury entering the environment.

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The Department of Toxic Substances Control's mission is to restore, protect, and enhance the environment and ensure public health, environmental quality and economic vitality by regulating hazardous waste, conducting and overseeing cleanups, and developing and promoting pollution prevention.

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"The energy challenge facing California is real. Every Californian needs to take immediate action to reduce energy consumption. For a list of simple ways you can reduce demand and cut your energy costs, see our Web-site at www.dtsc.ca.gov."